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My Rock and My Redeemer

Or

I Am God's Co-Pilot

2 Peter 1:1-11

Elder Bill Seiden
CPC 8-12-01

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Abba, Father, May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. PS 19:14

Amen

Have you ever had a sensation of your skin crawling or suddenly felt flush when something dramatic or critical has occurred in your life? Well, when Pastor Tom recently asked me if I'd been in his pulpit yet, I gulped and it happened to me. Then he asked if I would like to preach this morning, August 12th, and my blood pressure quickly shot up a few more points. Although I'll admit I've fantasized on occasion what I might talk about if I ever had an opportunity to speak from this venue, I always brushed it off as being beyond either my ability or well outside the bounds of reason or humility. Yet here I am. Why? It's a good question. As I retreated from Tom's office to ponder why I'd just left my senses behind and said yes, I began asking the Holy Spirit to show me the subject matter and help place the words on my heart that He wanted you to hear this morning. Aware of the sin of pride, sometimes called one of the "Seven Deadly Sins", I thought a lot about "Humility" as I sought His will.

Predictably, answers were slow coming and I spent a lot of time in prayer asking the Lord to show me the Way. As I fretted over what to do and how to present a sermon to people I've known for many years, as well as others who I'd never met, it became more and more evident that I had no choice but to rely on the Holy Spirit to guide my thoughts. Prayer and total reliance on Him was my only hope. It was that conclusion which led me toward the subject of this morning's sermon.

It won't likely surprise many of you to hear me say my life has not always been focused on my walk with Jesus. As I look back now, I regret the years lost to misguided pursuits and priorities. Please don't misunderstand me. I'm not suggesting that God wasn't guiding my every move even though I was unaware of His plan for my life. I think back to risky behaviors as a teenager, before wisdom had an opportunity to take hold, and shudder at what would have been the result if He hadn't had things planned for my future. I think of Jacquelyn Lee, the valedictorian of my high school class and her brother Randy, valedictorian of his class one year later - both of whom died in a head-on collision while driving to college one day in 1966. I think of 766 hours of combat time over North Vietnam and Laos during the war in Southeast Asia. I think of friends who were killed in action and others who have died of medical problems at far too young an age. It *is* only through the Spirit's power that I stand up here now before you! Yes, I have concluded that God had a plan for Bill Seiden. Discerning how that plan was conceived and how it will play out for me was and continues to be exciting and intense.

As I've sought to understand the journey, I have managed to recognize some of the steps along the way. My parents were good people who brought their mixed backgrounds of Judaism and Christianity together and raised six kids. My mom, who many of you knew, insisted that her children be raised in the church and my dad was quick to agree. He even attended as we kids had parts in skits or sang in the choir or in pageants. After high school I, like many, regrettably drifted away from regular church attendance, and I didn't really begin to connect again until Karen and I were married. I realized we needed God in our lives if our marriage was to have any real hope of success. When Kendra was born, we looked at one another and said, "God gave her to us and He'll show us how to be good parents for her." Each of our girls has been raised to know Jesus as Lord and Savior and they all love Him dearly. Praise be to God.

Arriving in Vacaville in 1985 was the turning point in my faith journey. Here at CPC, we enrolled in our first Bible study, the Bethel Series. Larry Friday was patient and guided Karen and I through an in-depth study of God's Word. I was beginning to take my faith seriously. When Pastor Tom arrived, I naively told him I was a brand new elder and he would probably be seeing a lot of me. I continued to pursue study by joining Tom's Shalom class for leadership development. There, we learned much more and explored church history including the heresies of the early church, and a thorough introduction to the spiritual gifts. Something else was also going on that I was not so aware of - bonds of Christian love were being set with those we spent time with studying God's Word. You know what I mean if you have been active in a long-term group Bible study.

As I look back today, I realize God was using many of my life experiences to mold me into the person He needed to help pursue ministry here at CPC and elsewhere. I learned that commitment meant saying yes when it might take me somewhat beyond my comfort zone. A little over two years ago, that commitment prodded me to approach Tom and tell him God had placed it on my heart that I had to teach a Bethel Series. It seemed God made it clear to me that He wanted this vital course presented and I was to be His vessel to accomplish it. Through the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and my obedience to His call, the experience was marvelous and extremely rewarding! Through it I discovered one of my spiritual gifts was teaching. Jesus was filling my cup to overflowing and I was just *beginning* to get the message! Another discovery was that Our Lord chooses people not for their perfection or even necessarily the maturity of their faith, but rather for their obedience. When I realized His prodding was purposeful and directed toward me, I was driven deeper into His Word and maturity began to come as a result.

Although the Lord had been showing His grace to me in many ways, I was still yet to realize something so far hidden to me. As the first of some in our congregation came back from an experience called Dunamis, they had an excitement about them that for me was magnetic. They were alive with a sense of God's love that I needed. I agreed to go to a Dunamis event in Seattle. That trip wasn't as fruitful as I had hoped and expected it would be. It was not yet a Kairos moment. It was not God's time. It was during my next Dunamis, "In the Spirit's Power", a year ago in San Mateo, that I finally understood why I'd spent a lifetime seeking Jesus and struggling to understand why others seemed closer to Him than I.

After diligently listening to the Dunamis teaching about the Holy Spirit, and how we can open ourselves up to His presence only through complete submission, I had the experience of receiving the infilling or "baptism" of the Holy Spirit during our evening worship service. Mind you, this was an amazing evening for a man who has always prided himself on attention to detail and being "in charge". I've been the analytical type who always needed volumes of background information to formulate a plan or carry out an assignment. What I learned that evening was the simple truth that Jesus told His disciples as related in Matthew 18:2-3. "He called a little child and had him stand among them. And He said, *'I tell you the truth, unless*

you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'" **The revelation for me was that my will had been thwarting His wishes for my life.**

Now I'm aware that many of *you* have *had* experiences in which you have come close to Jesus through the advocacy of the Holy Spirit. Some of you probably can relate to the longing I experienced when I saw a glow in the faces of people I believed to have realized an intimate relationship with Him. I'd like to reaffirm to you that Jesus meets us wherever we are. 1 Peter 1:2 tells us that we've "*been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through the sanctifying work of the Spirit*". He is intimately familiar with our strengths and our weaknesses. He knows all too well our fallen nature, yet He waits patiently for us to make the decision to follow Him. He longs for us to be holy and approach the perfection He designed for us. It is our very inability to achieve this perfection or live up to the law that caused Him to send His Son to pour out His blood so that we might live. Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb of God, came to bridge the gap for us - to make us worthy in the eyes of the Father. He came as God incarnate to feel our pain, our joy, our sorrow and our hope. Having come and lived as fully-man and fully-God, He has total knowledge of our personas. He knows us better than we know ourselves.

Earlier, I mentioned that my will had thwarted a Holy God's wishes for my life. I believe God has given us free will to enable us to choose to follow Him. This is an important distinction as some suggest free will means we are unrestrained and able to determine our own ideas of morality and holiness. I couldn't disagree more. God's grace should elicit a response from us out of our love for Him and our gratitude for His totally unselfish gift of Grace. This is the process we call Sanctification.

While the word Holy is certainly short, it truly has great meaning. As we focus on how we interpret our individual efforts to be more Christ-like, we need to look with honesty and candor at what Jesus said about our interactivity with the world. We need to recall that we are supposed to be "In the World" but not "Of the World". In parable after parable, as well as related conversations He had with leaders of the religious community of His day, Jesus exhorted us to be reverent toward the Father, and charitable, compassionate, honest, and, most of all, loving toward each other. In John 13:34, we read He told the Apostles gathered in the Upper Room just prior to going willingly to a hideous, excruciating death on the cross, *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."* Surely, we have our work cut out for us when we think of the nature of Christ's sacrifice for us.

Scripture, in the reformed tradition, is the one true guide we've been given to help us to connect to Christ's teachings and those of the Apostles who walked, ate, and slept with Him for three and a half years. John Knox, trained under John Calvin, and father of the Presbyterian denomination, gave us guidance in the Scots Confession as to how to view scripture. In Chapter 18 of the confession he said, "it is agreed by all that the Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of unity, cannot contradict himself. So if the interpretation or opinion of any theologian, Kirk, or council, is contrary to the plain Word of God written in any other passage of the Scripture, it is most certain that this is not the true understanding and meaning of the Holy Ghost, although councils, realms, and nations have approved and received it. We dare not receive or admit any interpretation which is contrary to any principal point of our faith, or to any other plain text of Scripture, or to the rule of love."

In his epistles, the Apostle Paul spends much time and energy focused on our need to recognize that striving toward holiness is critical for the church if it is to survive. I believe this is as true today as it was nearly two thousand years ago. We live in a society which waffles and retreats from standards of righteousness. As Holiness is a reflection of the nature of God, it seems

unattainable to us. It helps to realize we aren't expected to achieve it; indeed we are unable to achieve it in full measure until the New Jerusalem becomes a reality, until Christ comes again. But, we are expected to try.

It's also important to be wary of the erroneous notion that the God of the Old Testament seems to be one of wrath and judgment while Jesus in the New Testament preaches only love and forgiveness. I submit that both suppositions are shortsighted. The "I Am" of Avraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moshe and Jeshua, was both a loving and forgiving "Father" who chose a people and then covenanted with them to give them a "Promised Land" and make them as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand in the sea, and, at the same time, a God of tough love who would flood the Earth and destroy Sodom and Gomorrah rather than allow man's wretchedness to destroy His creation.

In a similar way, we often hear people describe Jesus as one who preached love and forgiveness. While that is certainly true, He also shredded the temple in anger, warned the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees that "*all the righteous blood shed on earth*" would fall on them (Mat 23:35), and in many parables warned of impending doom for the unrighteous. In the parable of the sheep and the goats (Mat 25:41), Jesus warns that the King will say, *"Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, and I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me."* v.46 says, *"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."* And let us remember that in Romans 8:10-11 He told the woman who had been brought to Him after being "caught" in adultery, *"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"* When she answered, "*No one sir*", He said, *"then neither do I condemn you. Now go and leave your life of sin."*

In Romans 12, Paul says, "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*" God, in the beginning, designed all of His creation to work together in harmony and peace. It is man's choices that have torn the creation asunder. I believe that only through disciplined study of God's Holy Word and deep immersion in prayer as communication with the Triune God, can we begin to understand the magnitude of either The Creation or our part in it. We were placed in the Creation as the crowning glory of God's work. We have often been guilty of being thorns rather than crowns. With this open and unabashed urging to seek the will of God, you have a glimpse of what I believe is my other spiritual gift - prophetic witness.

The bottom line of our claim to be Christians is *Christ!* To Him be all Glory and Honor. A Holy, omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient God sent His only Son to die for our sin. It is only through surrender that we can receive the crown of glory. As you go about your daily affairs this week, ask yourself if you have areas of your life you have held back and not turned over to God. As you interact with your family, friends, and co-workers this week, try to pause momentarily and think how that interaction might be if it were done in the presence of Jesus. It is, you know. And finally and most importantly, if you have not made a full and unabashed commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, I encourage you this morning to come forward after the service to dedicate or rededicate your life to following Christ Jesus, the one true Messiah. There will be representatives from the spiritual growth team in the front to pray with and support you.

I'd like to close with a quote from Joshua 24:14-15a. "*Now fear the LORD and serve Him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve…But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.*"

Having confessed my belief in submission as our only hope to achieve true relationship with our Lord, I invite you now to refer to your bulletins and join me in reaffirming our faith through recitation of the Nicene Creed.

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

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